

## A SPRING DAY AT CHEWTON

By A. J. TADGELL

A pleasant rail journey of about two and a half hours from Melbourne will bring you to Chewton, and then, if you be geological, you may walk for three miles to Castlemaine. Should you, however, be botanical, the encircling hills will tempt you, and you may wander away at once and find yourself in bushy surroundings. At the end of a day, even if it be unusually dry, as I found it, your specimens will total, as mine did, 100 species in flower out of the 140 natives and thirty-five aliens collected.

Perhaps you may be more commercially-minded and interested in the revival of the local gold mines, and will ask someone you may meet to point out the famous Wattle Gully Mine, that is yielding at the present time the largest share of the gold now being produced in Victoria. You may also be desirous of learning the names of the other half-dozen owners whose mine poppet heads show up near by. Heaps of Lower Ordovician slate mark the shafts, so you may be tempted to search for another *Monograptus* from the debris, or during your walk may have noted, in other places, where either prospectors or geologists have broken the softer stone, searching for Lower Darnwell graptolites or gold-bearing indicators. Even before the successful search of recent times for the precious metal, the district went back some eighty years, when rich shallow alluvial ground was turned over from end to end, while later the same ground yielded profits from dredging or pump sluicing.

The three miles between Chewton and Castlemaine do not lend themselves to scenic beauty, and, contrastingly, the ordinary person shudders when he reads of the installation elsewhere of huge dredges and realizes their devastations in the near future. A man once chided me by saying, after my revel in the glory of some natural surroundings: "You know, we cannot keep back the district because you want to grow a few orchids." I am afraid I was wanting in vision, and I thought of the other fellow, who asked what posterity had done for him. At Chewton one passes many potholes of the prospector, deeper shafts, now abandoned by the successful miner, and many waterways and diversions for supplying the liquid, not always valued, but without which so many gold-diggers find their work fruitless. Even the various strata shown in the railway cuttings may cause the thoughtless to stand in awe and attempt to read some sermons in stones. No doubt, years back, the hills around were verdant, covered with Eucalypts and underscrub of many species, so that even the diggers had their visitors, who revelled in spring sunshine, admiring the gentle undulations in the course of their walk.

To me, these conditions still held, and though Forest Creek and Wattle Gully might not be true to their former names, I found, in

a few miles of easy walking, that the day was warm although early in October, and there was much to entrance a botanist. Though the usual water one expected to see was missing in springtime, there was abundant bloom on *Eucalyptus polyanthemos*, and attached to many were strange-shaped gall-makers' homes, hard like the wood of the branches, curiously shaped like the antlers of a deer, or a long-eared fox, in size  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. by 1 in., *Apiomorpha (Brachycelis) munita*.

Other *Eucalyptus* species were few, and not tall. No ferns, except *Cheilanthes*, were seen, and very few orchids: *Diuris* (two), *Glossodia*, *Caladenia* (one), and *Pterostylis cyenoccephala*. Usually, in spring, many minute forms of plant life abound and gladden a walk, but this year they are not plentiful. *Brachycome exilis*, two minute *Helipterium* (as well as the large Hoary Sunray), two *Microcala*, *Levinhoekea*, *Stuartina*, *Toxanthus*, *Eriostemon abovialis* is prominent, and so is *Prostanthera decussata*; *Euphorbia collina* is always welcome, especially when abundant; a strong specimen of *Persoonia chamaepeuce* is in fruit. Two *Goodenias* are met at intervals, and some six *Acacias* enliven one's way, including *A. acinacea*, *A. lanigera*, *A. aspera*, *A. pycnantha*, *A. diffusa*, and *A. dealbata*, the latter going off. *Grevillea alpestris* is a fine sight, but its foliage is drab. Several species of *Pultenaea* are showing bursting buds. There are two *Dillwynias*, with first flowers, while two species of *Daviesia* are abundantly in bloom. Ever welcome are *Helichrysum*, *Brachyloma*, *Bulbine*, and *Lissanthe strigosa*, the last, to my disappointment, bearing that blue bloom-like fungus I noted on *Calythrix* in another place, but due, doubtless, to dry conditions. *Cotula coronopifolia* hercabouts has the foliage softer, and the colour of the flowers pale lemon, so different from the rich orange of those growing about Melbourn, although later in the day, when passing through Castlemaine, I found flowers of the normal colouring.

It was an enjoyment thus passing along the streets to see such fine specimens of exotic deciduous trees in their soft spring foliage and their varied spikes and pendant catkins, making a bold showing, for even flowers have their spring loves. There were several *Asperulas* and *Galiums*, so confusing to identify, because of their likeness and changed nomenclature. *Sherrardia*, with its bright blue tiny flowers, that close with the daylight, preferring rocky conditions, and so very much alike to their cousins, the Cleavers and Woodruffs.

Finally, *Hibbertia bicularis*, *Pinelia stricta*, *Kennedya*, not forgetting *Oxydium procumbens*, whose flowers also love the sun, were welcomed. Grasses were not overlooked in *Demasora Agropyrum*, two species of *Bromus*, two of *Danthonia*, and two of *Stipa*, *Poa bulbosa*, and others.